Aspen Delineation Project
2002 Report (March-October)

David Burton, Principal Investigator
peregrines@prodigy.net

Summary

In March 2002, a collaborative effort was begun by the US Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region to assess aspen extent, condition, history of treatment, and management options in the Sierra Nevada and Warner Mountains. The project has been given the title "The Aspen Delineation Project." The Bureau of Land Management, the California Department of Fish and Game, and the Sierra Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation agreed to collaborate in the effort. David Burton was asked to be Principal Investigator of the project. He has been working on aspen issues in the Eldorado National Forest for the past three years. It was agreed he would work on the project on a voluntary basis, under the direction of Diana Craig, Regional Wildlife Program Leader, U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, and under the immediate supervision of Jennifer Ebert, Acting Wildlife Biologist, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Two major tasks--described in detail below--were undertaken in 2002 under the auspices of the Aspen Delineation Project. The first was to conduct an extensive survey of agencies about aspen issues in California, and the second was the standardization of aspen inventory and stand assessment protocols.

2002 Activities

California Aspen Survey

The Aspen Delineation Project is undertaking a multi-year effort to assess the state of knowledge and management efforts regarding aspen on federal and state lands.

The principal goals and objectives of this effort are to identify (1) which government agencies in the state have aspen stands or jurisdictions related to aspen, (2) what those agencies know about their stands, (3) what kind of stand restoration projects have been undertaken, (4) what materials or workshops could be developed to help deal with aspen issues, (5) who are the principal agency contacts on aspen issues, and (6) what challenges, issues, or roadblocks are present in aspen management.

To start this effort a survey of National Forest and Bureau of Land Management Field Offices was conducted in April and May. A summary of the U.S Forest Service responses was published in June.

Of the 39 geographical entities thought to contain aspen, 34 (87%) responded to this survey. Respondents included 21 Ranger Districts, 3 National Forests (9 Districts), and 4 BLM Field Offices.

The survey summary addressed responses to questions regarding inventory and assessment, treatment, monitoring, and assistance that Districts believe would be useful in dealing with aspen issues. The summary was distributed to the cooperating agencies as well as the survey responders.

An additional outcome of this initial effort was the development of an extensive mailing list, which has been used on a number of occasions to announce aspen updates and events.

To develop a more comprehensive understanding of aspen issues in the region, the principal investigator conducted field visits with resource staff this summer in the following management units

- Modoc National Forest (Cedarville Ranger District)
- Tahoe National Forest (Truckee and Nevada City Ranger Districts)
- Lassen National Forest (Eagle Lake and Hat Creek Ranger District
- Plumas National Forest (Feather River Ranger District)
- Eldorado National Forest (Pacific, Placerville and Amador Ranger Districts)
- Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (Carson Ranger District)
- Stanislaus National Forest (Summit Ranger District
- Susanville Field Office(BLM)
- Cedarville Field Office (BLM)
- Departments of Forestry and Fish and Game, State of Nevada
- Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Inventory and Assessment Protocol Project

The Inventory and Assessment Protocol Project was designed to help standardize protocols for

- identifying the location of aspen stands
- providing an accurate description of stand structure
- recording conditions that might be putting stands at risk
- indicating unique stand management issues
- facilitating easy data transfer into GIS
- providing data that can be used for analysis.

This project was undertaken by a number of resource managers who identified at least ten different aspen inventory/assessment forms being used by Federal and State agencies. Resource managers recognized the value of a standardized form to insure better quality data collection, to help resource staff avoiding reinventing the wheel, and to provide for a mechanism for the effective merging of data. During the spring of 2002, a draft of a

standardized protocol for assessing stand conditions was distributed for review and comment. Several revisions were recirculated after all comments to drafts were considered. The principal reviewers of the protocol drafts were

- Tina Mark, Wildlife Biologist Tahoe National Forest
- Susan Yasuda, Wildlife Biologist Placerville Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest

- Jennifer Ebert, Acting Wildlife Biologist, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
- Tom Rickman, Wildlife Biologist, Eagle Lake Ranger District, Lassen National Forest
- Bobette Jones, Ecologist, Eagle Lake Ranger District, Lassen National Forest
- Adam Rich, Wildlife Biologist, Summit Ranger District, Stanislaus National Forest

Additional important comments were contributed by

- Eric Loft and Chris Stermer, California Fish and Game
- Shane Romsos and Jerry Dion, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
- Wayne Sheppard and Dale Bartos, Rocky Mountain Research Station
- Heather Canfield, Bureau of Land Management, Alturas Field Office, BLM
- Julie Evens, California Native Plant Society

Final drafts were field tested as part of two aspen inventory workshops sponsored by the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and the Aspen Delineation Project. The field testing was used to reveal any flaws in the data collecting protocol and to see if field crews could understand and interpret goals and objectives of the assessment process and come up with consistent interpretations of stand conditions.

Over the summer, eight training sessions were conducted for over fifty participants. Participants, included resource managers and field crew personnel from the following agencies:

- Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
- Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
- California Tahoe Conservancy
- Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
- Placerville Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest
- Summit Ranger District, Stanislaus National Forest
- Clavey River Ecosystem Project
- Informational Center for the Environment, University of California
- Feather River Ranger District, Plumas National Forest
- Alturas Field Office Bureau of Land Management
- Cedarville Field Office, Bureau of Land Management
- Division of Wildlife-Department of Conservation and Natural Resources-State of Nevada

- Division of Forestry-Department of Conservation and Natural Resources-State of Nevada
- California Department of Fish and Game, State Office
- California Department of Fish and Game, Redding Regional Office

The agencies listed above have used the final draft of the field form and protocols this summer either as a stand-alone aspen protocol or as a tag-on protocol when additional habitat attributes were being surveyed.

Additionally, a computer data program based on the field form has been developed by Don Yasuda, Wildlife Biologist, Pacific Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest, and is being beta tested this summer by a number of the participating agencies. It has been designed to simplify the process of moving hard copy data into GIS shape files as well as providing a vehicle for merging interagency aspen data into some centralized data source, the process for which is currently under development.

Project Assistance

• All of the principal investigator's time in 2002--approximated at 1200+ hours--was contributed to the Aspen Delineation Project.

Reimbursement for travel, per diem, accommodation, office supplies, and phone costs was shared during 2002 by

- US Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region's Wildlife Ecology Funds
- Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
- Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
- Modoc National Forest